

Editorials

Acknowledging the Problem With the CIA

Why has democratic self-government prospered so in America and fared so poorly in many other lands? One explanation, surely, is this nation's unique capacity to meet the often conflicting demands of idealism and realism. It's a quality in constant demand, as President Carter has already discovered twice in managing the Central Intelligence Agency.

The first instance involved the search for a CIA director strong enough to exert control over the agency yet acceptable to vocal conservatives in Congress. Carter served the requirements of realism by appointing an admiral and those of idealism by finding a man of intellect who was experienced in removing the barnacles from encrusted institutions such as the Naval War College. The enthusiastic confirmation of Admiral Stansfield Turner by the Senate represents a considerable victory for those dedicated to restoring the credibility of foreign intelligence.

This was hardly accomplished, however, before the news leaked that Jordan's King Hussein had been the recipient of millions of dollars in CIA funds over two decades—and that Carter hadn't been informed of this. The idea of such handouts to an Arab monarch is no more appealing than that of the CIA still hiding its private projects from the commander in chief. Yet Jordan could not have survived without foreign subsidies, and western subsidies seemed preferable to others.

The issue took hold just in time for the president's news conference last week. It was only his second as chief executive, and the pressures must have been strong to dodge, hedge or fudge. If his answers were guided by the simplistic rubrics of the candidate ("I will never tell a lie"), the possibility existed of seriously damaging the inescapable requirements of foreign policy by saying too much about the Jordan issue. On the other hand, the presi-

dent had his own credibility to protect.

"This is a very serious problem," he told his questioners, "of how in a democracy to have adequate intelligence gathered, assessed and used to guarantee the security of our country. It's not part of the American nature to do things in secret. Obviously, historically and still at this modern time there is a necessity to protect sources of information from other nations . . . I'll try to be sure . . . that everything we do is not only proper and legal but also compatible with the attitudes of the American people."

To ears jaded by the recent rhetoric of politicians, that may not sound like much of a commitment. In the real world, however, it's all one can really ask. Trust is the one bridge between idealism and realism, and it seems to us that President Carter enhanced his claim to trust by the way he responded last week to the public's legitimate concerns about the CIA.